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SOME ASPECTS OF THE LARGO CULTURAL PHASE, NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

H. P. MERA[198]

FOLLOWING a brief reference, in SCIENCE[199] to a paper presented by the writer at the Denver Meeting of the A. A. A. S., wherein the occurrence of Woodland-like vessel shapes in a Puebloan pottery complex was reported, a number of requests for further information have been received. In consequence of the apparent interest shown, the following preliminary report is offered.

During the progress of an archaeological survey of north central New Mexico in 1932, particularly in that section drained by the western tributaries of the upper Chama and southeasternmost affluents of the San Juan rivers, a large number of sites were recorded which, in architectural forms and pottery content, appeared to differ somewhat from more usual Pueblo patterns. The following year two structures in this region were excavated and more intensive surveys were made covering a larger area. Upon the totality of information thus obtained it has been possible to formulate the course and objectives for a program of investigation to be carried on over a period of several years. A condensed outline of this project, its scope, and a few of the problems involved are given below.

THE LARGO-NAVAJO PROJECT

A. It has now been demonstrated that Woodland-like pottery shapes in an otherwise predominantly Pueblo cultural complex were in use from at least the beginning of the 12th century up until about the first part of the 14th. This complex has been designated the Largo Phase.

Problems:

From where did these Woodland-like forms come and when were they introduced?

From which particular line of Pueblo culture was that part of the complex derived?

Did a Woodland people take over this Pueblo culture, or were they merged with one basically Puebloan?

B. In this same region, during the 17th century, an Athapascan people

[198] Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[199] August 13, 1937.

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(Navajo) were first noted who used a pottery possessing striking similarities to the Woodland-like forms of the earlier Largo Phase.

Problems:

Were these styles obtained from the peoples of the Largo Phase?
Did the Athapascans introduce Woodland-like forms independently?
Was there involved a merging of the two stocks?

C. During the first half of the 18th century groups of Pueblo people representative of all the villages of that time are known to have left their homes to found others to the north in Navajo territory. Here, evidence shows they became so closely associated with the Navajos that, although the use of Pueblo styles in decorated pottery was continued, the indigenous Woodland-like type practically superseded their own utility wares. During this association a new and distinct type of polychrome pottery, decorated with Puebloan designs on an orange-colored ground, first appears.

Problems:

Did the Navajo, as the result of this contact, acquire certain cultural traits derived from Pueblo sources, and with these an infusion of alien blood?

What relationship, if any, exists between the orange-colored decorated pottery of the Navajo, sparingly produced during the 19th century, and that of the Pueblo-like type of the middle 18th?

WORK ON THE PROJECT ACCOMPLISHED TO DATE

1. An intensive surface survey covering and delimiting the territory occupied by the Largo Phase has been completed.
2. As a result of the survey it has been found possible to publish a tentative outline regarding a succession of architectural types together with some information on the ceramic situation.[200]
3. Two seasons of excavation have uncovered four distinct habitation types which corroborate, by some of the dates obtained, a previously postulated succession of architectural types. All notes on this work have been prepared for publication.
4. Another surface survey has covered a considerable portion of the area in which village sites demonstrate a cultural complex that in-

[200] Mera, H. P., Ceramic Clues to the Pre-history of North Central New Mexico, Laboratory of Anthropology, Technical series, Bulletin No. 8., pp. 8–11., Santa Fe, 1935.

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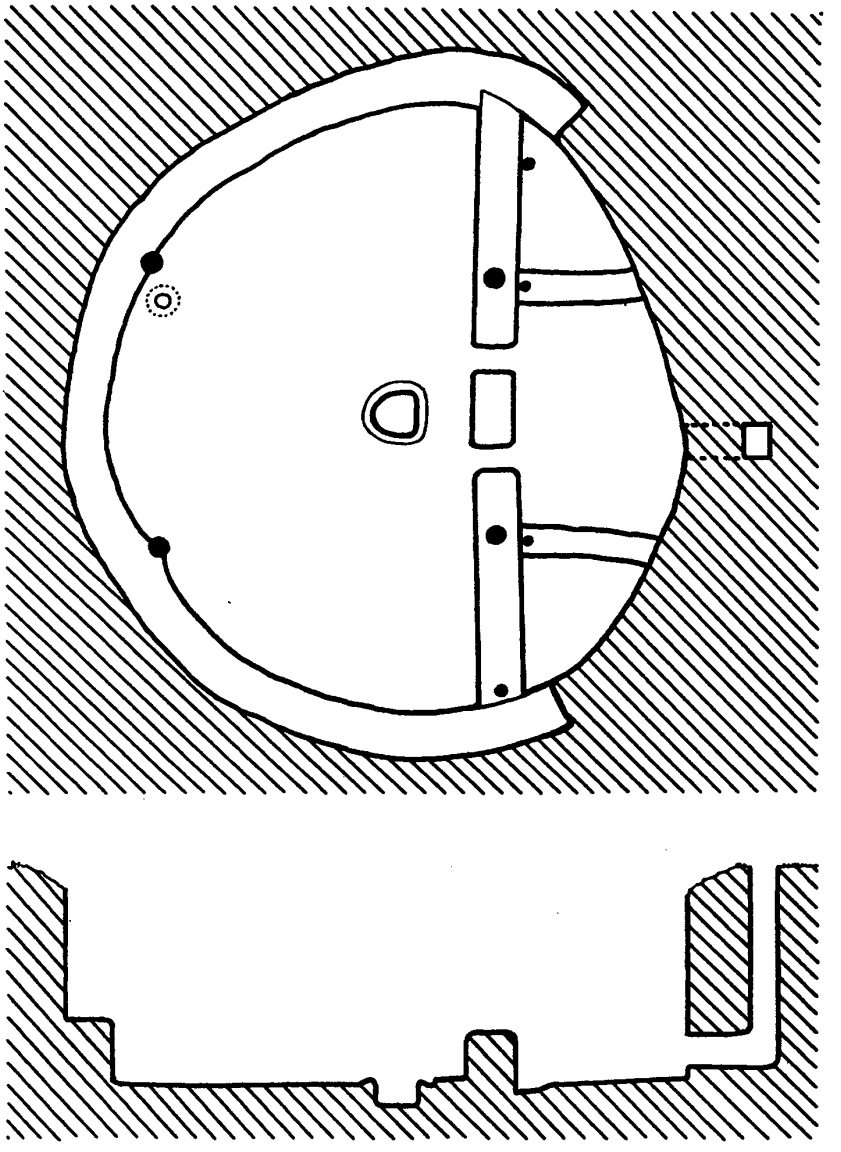

FIG. 14—Floor plan and north-south cross section through fire-pit.

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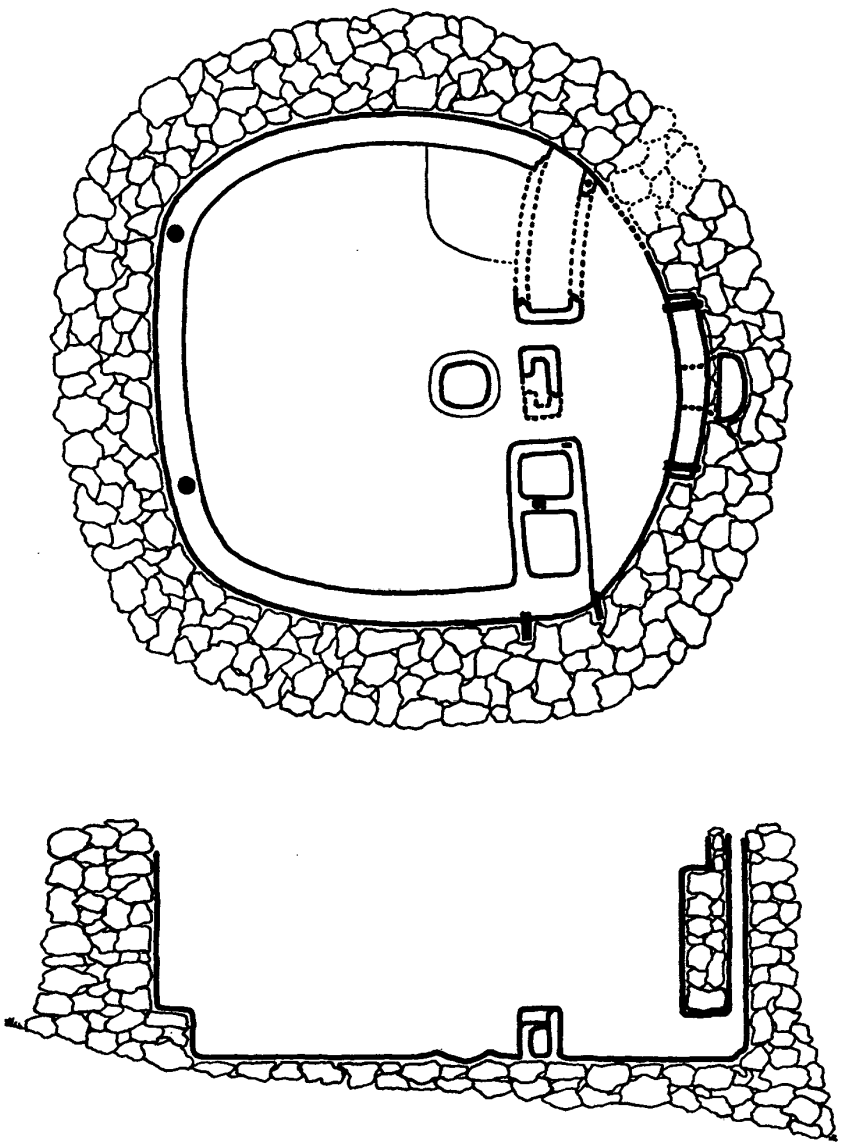

FIG. 15—Floor plan and north-south cross section through fire-pit.

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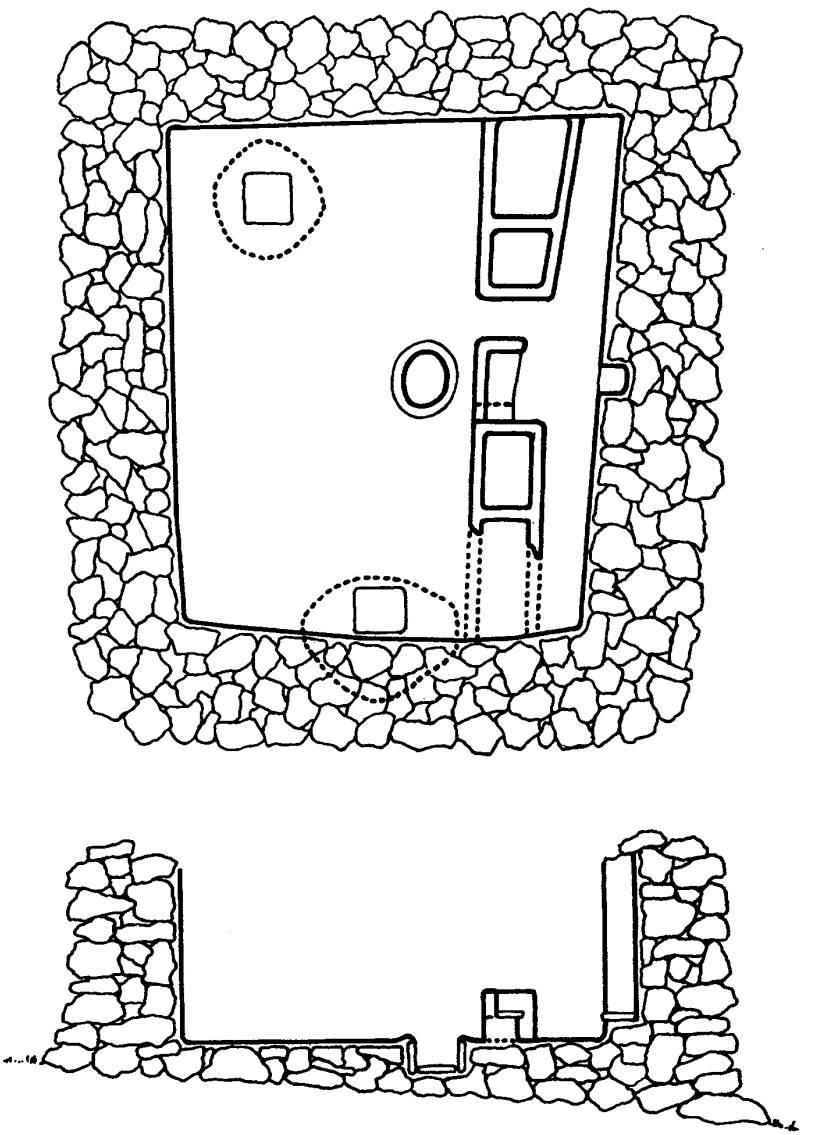

FIG. 16—Floor plan and north-south cross section through fire-pit.

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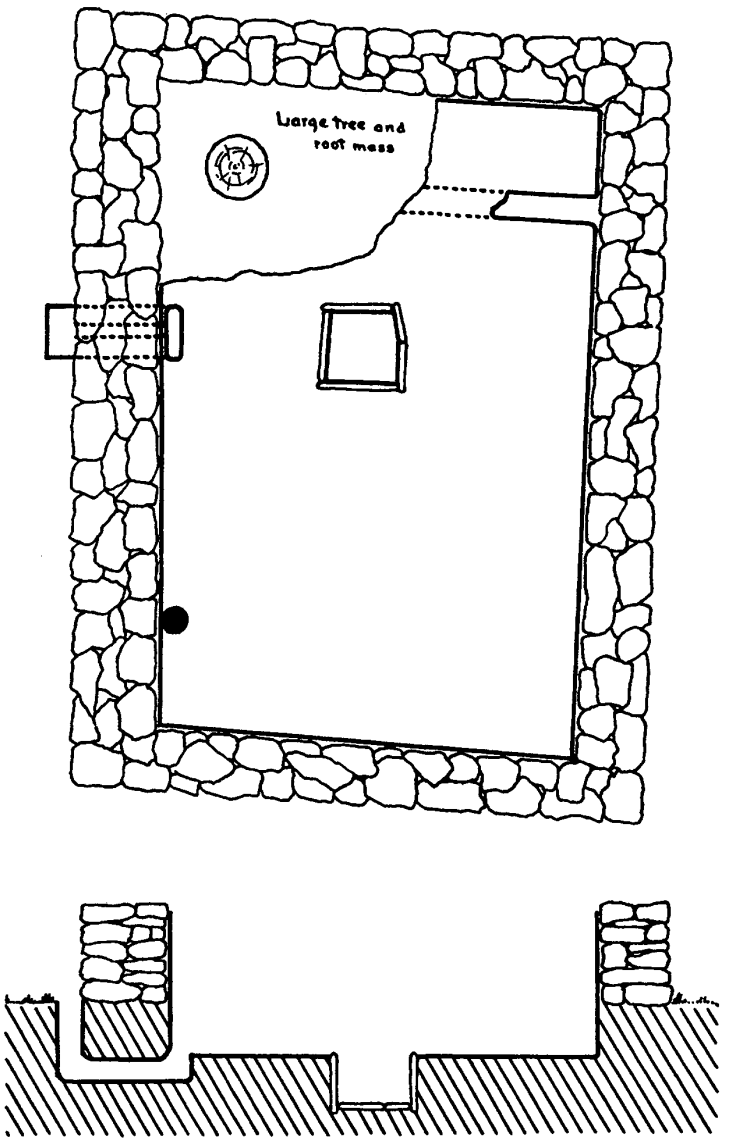

FIG. 17—Floor plan and east-west cross section through fire-pit.

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cludes both Pueblo and Navajo pottery and domiciliary types. A number of building dates from these have been secured.

5. Nearing completion, is an illustrated paper on the several Pueblo ceramic types and their developments during the period from the 16th to the early part of the 19th centuries, one of the objectives of which is to better understand and identify the various kinds of Pueblo pottery found in abundance on these Pueblo-Navajo sites.

Of the four house types excavated, three were surface structures; the fourth, a pit dwelling. This latter (Figure 14) measures nearly twenty-five feet at its widest, with a floor level that lies seven and one-half feet below the present ground surface. Although no detailed descriptions can be made at this time, attention is particularly directed to a feature that seems to have been perpetuated in one form or another in all stages of architectural development so far investigated. This reference is to low-walled storage bins. Two of these may be seen in the floor plan flanking the broad central passageway that extends from the rear of the deflector toward the ventilating shaft at the southern extremity of the house. A construction date of A.D. 1106 has been obtained for this dwelling.

Figure 15 illustrates a surface habitation which, in addition to more highly specialized storage bins projecting inward from the periphery on a line with the deflector, possesses uncoursed, roughly piled stone walls averaging four feet in thickness. The inside dimensions are: north-south, twenty-one feet; east-west, twenty feet. In this example the ventilator is also oriented toward the south. Charred beam material yielded a building date of 1253–54.

Another structure (Figure 16) with the same type of massive wall construction differs in being rectangular in shape but has an analogous arrangement of storage bins, deflector, and ventilator which occupy positions along the south side of the room. An interesting occurrence is to be seen in two large sub-floor cists; one near the west wall, the other in the north-east corner. These have depths of six feet nine inches and five feet five inches, respectively. The average room width is seventeen feet; and the length, twenty feet. No dates were obtainable.

An apparent advance in building technique is shown by a rectangular house, ten feet three inches by fifteen feet six inches, having coursed masonry walls (Figure 17). These were laid directly on the surface of the ground, although the floor level had been sunk to a depth of eighteen inches below the base of the masonry. Remains of a storage bin were found at the southern end of the room. The ventilator, differing in one

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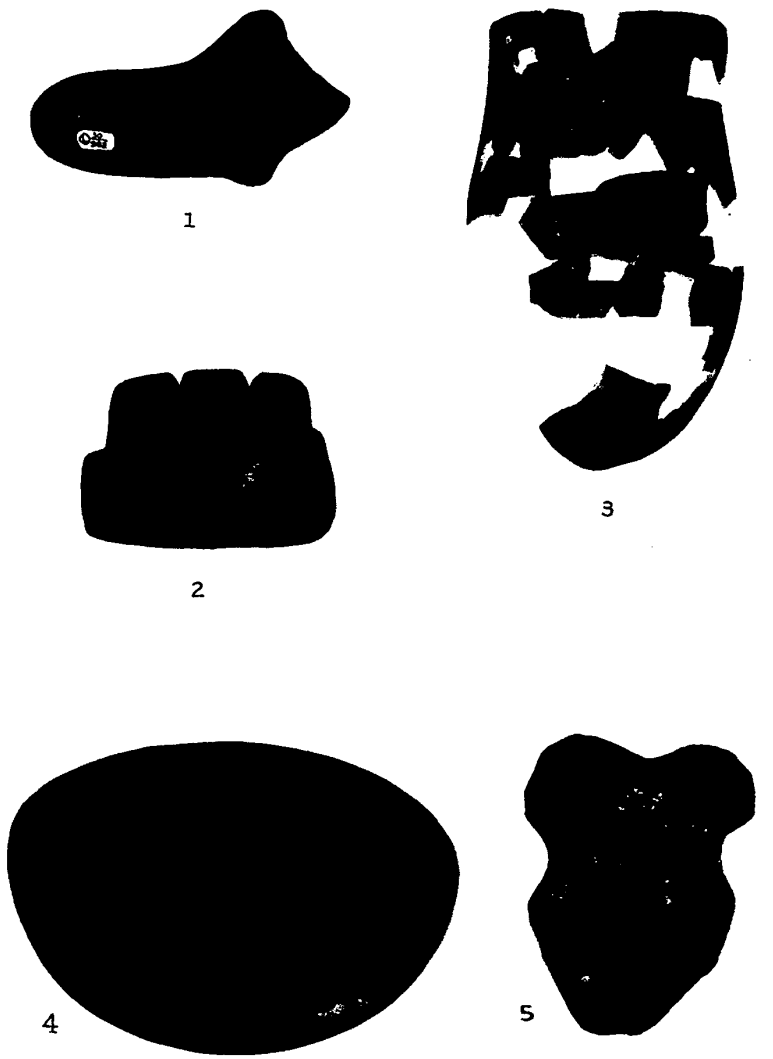

FIG. 1—Pottery pipe; Fig. 2—arrow-shaft tool; Fig. 3—Woodland-like pottery vessel; Fig. 4.—decorated bowl; Fig. 5.—notched axe.

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FIG. 1—Frontal region to show supraorbital ridges.

FIG. 2—Lateral view of skull to show the high position of the external occipital protuberance.

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respect from the three previously noted, was situated on the east side and constructed so that no deflector was required. This was accomplished by sinking the outer section of the ventilating shaft to a depth well below the floor level, then transversely beneath the wall and again upward into the room, so that a current of air was not directed across the fire-pit. Though this house had been burned, no wood was recovered suitable for dating.

There remain other domiciliary types belonging to this phase yet to be investigated, among which are some that had even reached the small pueblo stage.

Notwithstanding a recognizable progression in architectural development, there did not seem to have been a corresponding advance in pottery styles. It is true that some of the painted pottery from sites, believed on architectural evidence to be among the latest, shows some elaboration of decorative detail, yet a great deal of the material from ruins of this class indicates the retention of older basic design formulas without alteration. Such a condition appears to be due to a lack of intercourse with peoples of surrounding areas, a view which seems to be borne out by the very evident scarcity of intrusive pottery. A typical decorated bowl is illustrated on Plate 9, Figure 4.

The presence of conical-bottomed, Woodland-like utility vessels as a normal constituent in the Largo ceramic complex, otherwise predominantly Puebloan in character, also presents a most unusual situation. Whole or partially restorable jars of this type have been found in every site excavated, and numerous sherds occur in surface collections, irrespective of the stage of architectural advancement. Fillets, plain or more rarely with simple decorative treatments, were universally applied at rim level or shortly below. Heights range from about eight inches to sixteen and one-half inches. An example having the latter measurement is shown on Plate 9, Figure 3.

Other objects of material culture identified with the Largo Phase are: a distinctive axe form, an unusual arrow-shaft tool, and a pottery pipe that approaches some of the elbow forms. This latter has two knobs affixed on either side at the base of the bowl to hold it upright when not in use. Typical examples of all three may be seen on Plate 9, Figures 1, 2, 5.

Although satisfactory progress is being maintained towards solving the several problems herein outlined, it is plainly evident that much more work remains to be done before even tentative conclusions may be drawn.

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